

30 September 1959

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Dear Tom:

Subject: Translation of Slogans

In April and October, RPB issues a comparative analysis of new May Day or October Revolution slogans relying on the English translation from Russian. The general problem for the analyst is to produce, within the briefest possible period after the slogans are issued, an accurate and informative analysis revealing changes and differences in the slogans as compared with those issued previously. Since significant changes in the slogans have often involved only a seemingly minor change in phraseology or syntax, the reliability and validity of a slogan report are largely dependent on the accuracy and consistency of the English translation provided because the original Russian of the slogans is not available here until after the report is published.

One problem arises from the fact that the analyst relies mainly on a file of the slogan translations collected over the years to make comparisons and discover variations. There is always a chance that the analyst may interpret a change in the wording of a particular slogan in a new set of slogans as a real change when in reality such a change may only reflect a variation in a translator's rendition of the Russian while the slogan itself remains the same as its predecessors. In order to reduce the chances that a variation existing in the translation only will be mistaken for a real change, a constant effort should be made to increase the consistency of the translations as each new set of slogans becomes available. Often, depending on the translator, stock phrases are rendered differently (not incorrectly) from time to time. For example, the greeting Да здравствует! is variously translated as Long Live! or Heil! or the phrase, Да здравствует огнемыре славой побед славесныye Sowetskikh Vooruzhennyx Sily, in the armed forces slogan as:

Heil to the valiant Soviet Armed Forces hallowed by their splendid victories....
 Heil to the valiant Soviet Armed Forces glorified by the splendid victories....
 Long live the gallant Soviet Armed Forces hallowed by the glory of victories....

Although these examples of variations in the slogan translations have not done violence to the sense of the slogans, such variations

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could be eliminated by standardizing the translation of such phrases. Such an effort at standardization, where possible, would facilitate the rapid identification of real variations in the slogans by the analyst.

Such a process could be started by having the translator check back to last April's May Day slogans—in the version published in the attached Radio Propaganda Report, which incorporates the Bureau's corrections—using them as a model for the translation of stock phrases. Where the translation of such phrases varies in the course of the set of slogans, one appropriate translation should be selected and consistently adhered to. The same procedure should be applied in the future also.

As a general rule, the translator should provide transliterations whenever there is any doubt and whenever new wording is introduced into the slogans. As mentioned above, the translation can use the preceding set of slogans as a guide for noting what new words, phrases, or grammatical constructions have been introduced.

The stereotyped and repetitious form of the slogans requires a special effort on the part of the translator to maintain his sensitivity to minute changes in phraseology and construction. The problem which arose—described in our 30 April 1957 letter on the slogans—over the distinction between "builders of" and "building socialism" in the greetings to bloc countries is illustrative of the need for care. I think it would be prudent to mention these points to the BBC now in whatever form you feel will be most productive, and let me know their reaction.

Sincerely,

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Acting Chief, [redacted]

Attachment: Radio Propaganda Report CD.136

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